FWIS 152 FRESHMAN WRITING-INTENSIVE SEMINAR
Spring 2015, Anderson Hall 210, Thursday, 1-3:30pm
Prof. Sara Stevens
Email: sara.k.stevens@rice.edu
Office: 326 Anderson Hall, x3546

The Visual Culture of American Suburbia

Though suburban America has been cliché for more than a century, our vocabulary for describing the strip malls and boomburgs of the twentieth century is limited. This class will take to heart architectural historian Reyner Banham's statement, "I learned to drive in order to *read* Los Angeles in the original." To develop a new fluency in American suburbia, we will examine advertisements, television, film, and criticism that represent both the production and consumption of the low-density fringes of American cities. Through representations of urban and architectural forms, the class will evaluate the political and economic contexts that undergird suburbia.

Assignments and Grading: This class focuses on writing as a process and a skill to develop. In addition to exploring the content of the course, we will explicitly focus on the craft of writing, dedicating class time to short assignments and workshop sessions that will improve your skills and deepen your thinking on the subject matter. Throughout the semester students will be assigned to revise their own work and practice peer reviewing.

We will begin the semester with an ungraded writing assignment, due the second week of class. The subsequent assignments will build toward a longer, analytic paper: first, a short comparison paper will suggest an area of interest. Then, an in-class workshop will develop that area of interest into a broader topic. An abstract and annotated bibliography will stake a claim for the longer paper and outline its source material. A visual and oral presentation will develop and extend the argument from the abstract. All this work culminates in a longer paper that will fully explore the topic and argue the thesis. Finally, as a dénouement, an op-ed piece or manifesto will project the argument of the longer paper forward into the present day.

Additionally, you are highly encouraged to make an appointment with a consultant at the Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication (CWOVC) to review/revise any one of your assignments *before* it is due, and communicate to me in an email how the appointment did or did not improve your writing. This will earn you extra credit. (Note that this requires advance planning—setting the appointment and completing your assignment before the deadline.)

- Ungraded writing assignment (500 words): 0%
- Participation: 15%
- In class writing / revisions / peer reviewing / Pecha Kucha (throughout semester): 20%
- Short paper (1000 words): 10%
- Abstract and annotated bibliography (250-500 words, plus bibliography): 10%
- Visual and oral presentation of research topic: 15%
- Long paper + revisions (2500 words): 20%
- Op-ed or manifesto (1000 words): 10%
- One-time extra credit for appointment with CWOVC consultant for any assignment

Honor Code: One of the purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and the appropriate uses of different types of evidence. Accordingly, FWIS instructors will take an educational approach to transgressions of these rules and respond to errors in these areas foremost as issues for grading and opportunities to correct errors, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. At the same time, all FWIS instructors retain the authority to treat instances of repeat or egregious violations as matters for the attention of the Rice Honor Council. In this course, students are expected to do the actual writing of their assignments on their own, with no outside help from anyone else. However, students are strongly encouraged (and will sometimes be required) to collaborate on all other aspects of their coursework; including discussing assignments, reading each other's work, and making suggestions for editing and revision.

Resources: You are encouraged to make appointments with the peer consultants at the Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication for your assignments in this course. These consultants do not proofread or edit your work, but they will provide feedback on topics such as the organization of your paper or presentation, the coherence of your argument, appropriate sentence structure, and consistent grammatical errors. You can make an appointment at the Center's website: cwovc.rice.edu.

Guidelines:

- Papers are due at 8:00pm the day before class, digitally on owlspace. In addition, bring three copies of your work to class for every assignment.
- Two books are for purchase, available at the bookstore and online (I recommend bookfinder.com for finding used books). Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese's (eds.) *The Suburb Reader* (ISBN 9780415945943) and Andrew Blauvelt's (ed.) *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes* (an exhibition catalog, ISBN 9780935640908). Any edition/version/format will do. A copy of each is also on reserve in Fondren library.
- Other readings will be available on owlspace a week before each class meeting. The purpose of the course readings is to foster a good, engaged discussion. Therefore, you are required to print out the readings and bring them to class along with your notes so we can refer back to them.
- I reserve the right to make changes to the readings and assignments as the semester moves along, but will stay within the boundaries of the work load signaled in this syllabus.
- Please be polite to your classmates by staying focused during class: no texting, social media, web surfing, etc.

- I will respond to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends and holidays. If you have a question about an assignment or want help, I need to know before 4:30p.m. the day before it is due.
- No extensions; the deadlines are firm.
- No unexcused absences.
- Any student with a disability that requires accommodation should contact me outside of class and Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
- Office location: Herring Hall 310. (My door is open, but please email before you visit in case I'm away from my desk.)

Schedule and Topics:

Week 1: Introduction (Not Suburbia, but NYC**)** **January 15**

- In class reading: Ada Louise Huxtable, "Sometimes We Do It Right," (*New York Times*, March 31, 1968)
- In class reading: Alexandra Lange, "Introduction," from *Writing About Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012).
- Film clip for response paper from Prelinger Archive (http://archive.org/details/prelinger) or *Call It Home* videodisc (Keller Easterling and Richard Prelinger; available here http://www.columbia.edu/cu/gsapp/projs/call-it-home/html/)

Week 2: American Suburban History Overview **January 22**

- **UNGRADED RESPONSE PAPER DUE 8pm January 21** (500-750 words)
- Readings from *The Suburb Reader,* henceforth [SR] p. 26-39; 247-253; 273-281: this includes excerpts from Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of America* (1985); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (1987); and Dolores Hayden, "Building the American Way: Public Subsidy, Private Space," (2004).
- Andrew Blauvelt, "Preface," in *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt, (Walker Art Center, 2008), henceforth [WA], 10-16.
- Holley Wlodarczyk. "Intermediate Landscapes: Constructing Suburbia in American Photography," in [WA] 101-112.

Week 3: Ticky-Tacky Houses / The Aesthetics of Production **January 29**

- Larrabee, Eric. "The Six Thousand Houses That Levitt Built." *Harper's Magazine* 191, no. 1180 (September 1948): 79-88. [owlspace]
- Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (2001) [SR], p. 281-284
- John Archer, "Suburban Aesthetics Is Not an Oxymoron," *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes* [WA], p.129-146.

Week 4: The Picture Window / Vision Visuality Surveillance **February 5**

- **SHORT PAPER DUE, 8:00pm February 4 (bring 3 copies to class)**
- Sandy Isenstadt, "Million $ View," *American Art* 25, no. 1 (2011), 19-21. [owlspace]
- Dianne Harris, "Magazine Lessons: Publishing the Lexicon of White Domesticity" in *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: UMinn Press). [owlspace]
- Robert Beuka, "The View Through the Picture Window: Surveillance and Entrapment Motifs in Suburban Film," [WA], 89-100.

- Dan Graham, “Homes for America” (Dec, 1966 Arts Magazine, available here: http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/83406/1/homes-for-america), “‘Picture Window’ Piece,” and “Alteration to a Suburban House,” (1978) [owlspace]

Week 5: The Lawn / Pastoralism Ethics Leisure **February 12**

- **REVISION OF SHORT PAPER DUE, 8pm February 11 to owlspace**
- Georges Teyssot, “The American Lawn: Surface of Everyday Life,” from *The American Lawn*, ed. Georges Teyssot (Princeton Architectural Press: 1999), 1-9, 21-29. [owlspace]
- J. B. Jackson, “Vernacular Gardens,” in *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (Yale: 1994), 119-132. [owlspace]
- Becky Nicolaides, excerpt from *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (2002), [SR] p. 210-216.
- Bill Owen, selections from *Suburbia* (Straight Arrow, 1973) [owlspace]

Week 6: The Housewife / Separate Spheres Domesticity Media **February 19**

- **ABSTRACT + ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE, February 18, 8:00pm** (bring 3 copies to class)
- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) [SR], p. 300-303.
- Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Pantheon, 1988), [SR], 60-63.
- Dolores Hayden, “What Would a Non-sexist City Look Like?” (1981); republished in LeGates, Richard T., and Frederic Stout (eds.), *The City Reader,* New York: Routledge, 2003, 142-157. [owlspace]
- Lynn Spigel, “Women’s Work,” from *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (University of Chicago, 1992), 73-98. [owlspace]

Week 7: The Freeway / Mobility Infrastructure Modernism **February 26**

- **Pecha Kucha** of design projects, with critique
- Edward Tufte, “The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint” [owlspace]
- William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (1956), [SR] 295-298.
- Reyner Banham, “Ecology IV: Autopia,” from *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Pelican, 1971), p. 213-222. [owlspace]
- Peter Hall, “Retro Urbanism: On the Once and Future TOD,” in *Sprawl and Suburbia*, ed. William S. Saunders (Minnesota, 2005), p. 122-129. [owlspace]

Week 8: SPRING BREAK **March 5**

Week 9: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS **March 12**

Week 10: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS **March 19**

Week 11: The Cul-de-sac / Planning Exclusion Race **March 26**

- Andrew Wiese, “Chapter 9” from *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. [owlspace]
- Emily Straus, “Introduction” from *Death of a Suburban Dream: Race and Schools in Compton, California* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press). [owlspace] ****IN CLASS SKYPE DISCUSSION WITH THE AUTHOR****

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic Monthly* June 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/ (Accessed January 2, 2015) [owlspace]
- George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the ‘White’ Problem in American Studies,” (1995), [SR], 341-344.
- Additional reading on Ferguson (not required):
  - David Eads and Helga Salinas, with photos by Patricia Evans, “Demolished: The End of Chicago’s Public Housing,” NPR 23 December 2014; http://apps.npr.org/lookatthis/posts/publichousing/
  - Richard Rothstein, “The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of its Troubles,” *Economic Policy Institute*, October 15, 2014 http://www.epi.org/publication/making-ferguson/
  - See list at: http://urbanresearchnetwork.org/ferguson-syllabus/

Week 12: WRITING WORKSHOP **April 2**

Week 13: The Bulldozer / Technology Construction Environmentalism **April 9**
- **RESEARCH PAPER DUE, 8:00pm April 8**
- Francesca Russello Ammon, "Unearthing Benny the Bulldozer: The Culture of Clearance in Postwar Children’s Books," *Technology and Culture* 53, no. 2 (April 2011): 306-36. [owlspace]
- D. J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (Norton, 2005), 1-25. [owlspace]

Week 14: Buyways / Roads, Aesthetics, Consumerism, Politics **April 16**
- Peter Blake, *God’s Own Junkyard* (1964), p. 7-16 plus images. [owlspace]
- J. B. Jackson, “Other-Directed Houses,” in *Landscape* 6 n.2, Winter 1956, 29-35. [owlspace]
- Malcolm Gladwell, “The Terrazzo Jungle,” New Yorker, March 15,2004, 120-127. [owlspace]
- Stanley Kurtz, “Burn Down the Suburbs?” *National Review Online*, August 1, 2013, http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/312807/burn-down-suburbs-stanley-katz [Accessed 4 April 2013].

Week 15: Final Reviews in architecture – No class **April 23**

OP-ED / MANIFESTO AND REVISED RESEARCH PAPER DUE, 8pm **May 8**

Acknowledgements
This syllabus benefitted from ideas and examples by and/or conversations with Andrew Baker, Terry Doody, #FergusonSyllabus, Alan Fleishacker, Emily Straus, Robert Fogelson, Kian Goh, Brian Goldstein, Gina Greene, Dolores Hayden, Ana María León, Dael Norwood, Margaret Pugh O'Mara, Max Page, Enrique Ramirez, the Princeton Writing Program, David Salomon, and Jennifer Wilson.

Copyright
This course syllabus is shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License (CC-BY-NC). You are free to adapt, copy, distribute, or transmit the work for noncommercial purposes, provided proper attribution is given. For details, please see: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/